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ABSTRACT

After reviewing the purposes of descriptive research on teaching in general, this paper discusses the value of using a system of analysis and a technical language to describe classroom interaction. The need for such descriptive research in language classrooms is then outlined in detail. A critical review of the few systems of analysis designed for the language classroom and of the research studies done in this field is presented. The paper concludes with a call for more objective research that is experimental, as well as descriptive, in nature. The hope is expressed that these studies will provide the empirical evidence that is needed in order to prescribe specific teacher behaviors that will effect desired student outcomes. (Author/GC)

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TEACHING BEHAVIORS IN SECOND OR FOREIGN LANGUAGE CLASSROOMS: A Critical Review of Descriptive Research in the Field of Language Teaching.

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Abstract

After reviewing the purposes of descriptive research on teaching in general, the author discusses the value of using a system of analysis and a technical language to describe classroom interaction. The need for such descriptive research in language classrooms is then outlined in detail. A critical review of the few systems of analysis designed for the language classroom and of the research studies done in this field is then presented. The author concludes with a call for more objective research that is experimental as well as descriptive in nature. Hopefully, these studies will provide the empirical evidence that is needed in order to prescribe specific teacher behaviors that will effect desired student outcomes.

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TEACHING BEHAVIORS IN SECOND OR FOREIGN LANGUAGE CLASSROOMS: A Critical Review of Descriptive Research in the Field of Language Teaching.

I. Introduction: The Importance of Descriptive Research on Teaching

A fundamental aim of research on teaching is to contribute to our knowledge and understanding of the teaching process so that we might improve instruction by discovering those variables which correlate most highly with student learning and achievement. Most early studies, which concentrated on correlating teacher characteristics with student achievement, produced few immediately applicable results. This led the Committee on Criteria of Teacher Effectiveness of the American Educational Research Association (1953) to conclude that:

> "The simple fact of the matter is that, after 40 years of research on teacher effectiveness during which a vast number of studies have been carried out, one can point to few outcomes that a superintendent of schools can safely employ in hiring a teacher or granting him tenure, that an agency can employ in certifying teachers, or that a teacher-education faculty can employ in planning or improving teacher-education programs." (P. 657)

It is only recently that research on teaching has turned its focus to describing interaction in the classroom. It is hoped that, by looking into classrooms and observing the behaviors of and the interaction between teachers and students, we may first come to a greater understanding of the teaching process as it occurs. This may be followed by studies correlating specific behaviors with desired student outcomes. Ultimately, we aspire to being able to prescribe specific teacher behaviors for specific goals.

II. The Use of a System of Analysis to Describe Classroom Interaction

Many researchers (for example: Rowe (1969), Good & Brophy (1973) and Jackson (1968) have encountered a gap between what teachers do in the classroom and what they think they do. Good & Brophy (1973) reasoned that a major cause of the teachers' lack of perception or awareness of their own behavior was that "... teacher-training programs have seldom equipped teachers with specific teaching techniques or provided them with specific skills for analyzing and labeling (their own) classroom behavior. Much of the teachers'

lack of awareness in observing and monitoring their own behavior stems from the fact that they have not been taught any systematic technique for conceptualizing teacher behavior." Good & Brophy believed that, "If teachers are trained to identify and label specific teaching goals and specific skills to be used in reaching them, ...they might become aware of alternative ways of achieving these goals." (P. 32)

The contributions to teacher-training of such systems used to describe and analyze teaching behavior are that they provide more information on the teaching process and build an awareness, on the part of the supervisor and teacher alike, of alternate means of behavior. Most important, they function as a non-evaluative, non-judgmental objective observer. Lewis & Miel (1972) point out that the value of a system lies in the fact that "the evidence takes the form of a neutral record, not one screened through the supervisor's values and perceptions, which the teacher can use for self-study and which the ...teacher and supervisor...can use together in studying teaching with a view to improving it." (P. 223)

As Simon & Boyer (1974) explained, these systems provide "mirrors" that allow the teacher to obtain feedback on the teaching behaviors that he does as well as does not use. Systems also provide a common language that teachers and supervisors alike can use to discuss the teacher's performance and to expand his repetoire of behaviors. (P. 20)

John Fanselow (1976) drew an analogy between the lack of a technical language or system with which to discuss teaching and the situation in the Japanese film Rashomon, where four witnesses to the same event gave four different and contradictory accounts of it. (a: P. 2)

Without a system of analysis and a common language with which to discuss a teaching event, what each observer sees is colored by his own perceptions and preconceived notions. "Consequently, the words he uses to describe each teaching act will often have meanings that do not coincide with meanings attached to them by another viewer." (a: P. 3)

III. The Need for Descriptive Research in Language Classrooms

Despite a proliferation of systems designed to explore, describe and analyze classroom process variables and teacher-student interaction in general (Rosenshine & Furst listed over 100 in 1972), few systems of analysis have been designed for the second or foreign language classroom. Yet, the need for descriptive research in language classrooms has been expressed time and time again.

Deploring the failure of educational research to contribute to foreign language teaching methodology, Carroll (1963) suggested that the inability of investigators of the language teaching process to produce useful results stemmed from the fact that their "...experimental settings and materials

have not been sufficiently similar to those of the actual teaching situation as it occurs in the classroom or in the language laboratory." (a: P. 1094)

The surprising results of the Pennsylvania Foreign Language Project, which failed to demonstrate the superiority of the audio-lingual approach to language teaching over the more traditional cognitive one, also failed to demonstrate any relationship between the teacher's background and student achievement. This led Smith (1970) to state that "the foreign language education profession has for the past decade or more been predicting teaching strategies, materials and electro-mechanical devices on theoretical assumptions that may not be entirely valid..." (P. 239). He suggested that the real causes of variation in student achievement may lie, not in the teacher's background, but in the process of teaching and teacher-student interaction, and recommended that "...future research involving teaching strategies or classroom procedures attempt to precisely and objectively measure the instructional process within the individual classroom. (P. 239)

Berkmaier (1973), in reviewing research in foreign language teaching, called for "...an analysis of teacher performance in the new type of foreign language programs translated into behaviors which can be objectively described and evaluated." (P. 1295)

Tarone, Swaine & Fathman (1976) outlined some specific limitations of current research in second language acquisition in order to caution against making "hasty pedagogical applications" from them, and concluded that "clearly the most immediately 'relevant' research for the classroom should be research done in the classroom." (P. 19)

Dissatisfaction with traditional methods, books and teacher-training programs, which used vague, global terms to describe what a "good" language teacher does, contributed substantially to the current trend toward Competency-Based Teacher Education in the United States. Descriptive research in language classrooms is particularly needed in the context of OBTE, which uses precise, behavioral terms in setting the teacher competencies which are the bases for certifying and licensing language teachers. In order to specify what it is that teachers must do, we first need to know what it is that teachers are really doing in their classrooms now.

In addition, as Dunkin & Biddle (1974) noted, "...those who state performance criteria must ultimately seek to establish whether behaviors matching the specifications can be observed, and, if so, under what conditions they appear. The stating of performance criteria for teaching may absolve us of the need for studying pupil outcome, but does not free us from looking at classroom behavior. Indeed, if classroom behavior is our measure of success, looking at the evidence becomes all the more important." (P. 28)

In addition to the prescriptions set forth by proponents of the various methodological schools, checklists, guidelines and lists of teacher competencies are now being prepared, often with little regard for empirical evidence of what has been proved effective. For example, in 1972, Markwardt and the National Association of Teachers of English to Speakers of Other Languages (TESOL) drew up guidelines which suggest "desirable competencies" for ESL teachers. Lee (1973), in presenting a list of thirty objectives for teacher competencies, developed by the Florida affiliate of TESOL, explained that the rationale behind developing such behaviorally stated prerequisites for teacher certification was the need "...to develop our own behavioral specifications of what a good ESL teacher can do..." (P. 13) Anger (1974) assembled a teacher checklist of twenty questions. Positive responses to them were "...indicative of a good (ESL) class." (P. 25)

Unfortunately, none of these three guides base any of their suggestions upon either a description of classroom processes or upon findings of actual predictive variables. Yet, as Bellack (1966), B. O. Smith (1971) and so many other researchers have noted, a description of what occurs in the classroom must precede any prescription of what should occur. Jackson (1968) pointed out the importance of seeking "...an understanding of the teaching process as it is commonly performed before making an effort to change it." (P. 175)

IV. A Critical Review of Descriptive Research Done In Language Classrooms

Despite this expressed need, few systems of analysis have been designed for the language classroom and even fewer research studies have been carried out in this area. These systems range from fairly simplistic, uni-dimentional approaches to more comprehensive, multi-dimentional ones.

Mackey (1965) suggested a model for analyzing the techniques of a language lesson. It included an examination and evaluation of the teacher's use of a lesson plan, the equipment and layout of the classroom, and the techniques of both presentation and repetition. This was, however, not so much a system for description as a list of questions, some of which required highly inferential judgments on the part of the observer. (For example: "How efficient was the questioning?" Or: "Is vividness of presentation and emotional appeal kept for the important points?" (pp. 369 & 365)

The difficulty of using such a system is that first, all feedback is filtered through the subjective eyes of the supervisor or observer, and secondly, much of the description is presented in the vague, global terms that have plagued pre-descriptive research.

Jarvis (1968) recognized the need to develop a category system for classifying behaviors unique to the language classroom. However, rather than simply describe what occurs in a language classroom, he devised a prescriptive model and postulated "an ideal average frequency" for various

categories of behavior. He then used the model as a standard against which the teaching behaviors of fourteen graduate teaching assistants in French at Purdue University could be compared. (P. 339)

Each teacher was observed for two class hours, teaching structure and vocabulary, and, at regular intervals of five, ten or fifteen seconds, an observer recorded which of the categories was occurring.

This was a step toward objective observation. Unfortunately, Jarvis' categories were rather gross, and he ignored large areas of teacher behavior. No information regarding either the patterns or frequency of the various classroom behaviors was presented in his findings.

Politzer & Weiss (1970), in an attempt to identify specific classroom behaviors and the characteristics of successful foreign language teachers, videotaped four lessons of seventeen teachers of first year high school French, and recorded four fiftenn-minute segments, taken from different parts of each lesson over a five-month period. The researchers then devised a rating sheet of selected classroom techniques, and correlated their frequency of occurrence with student achievement.

While there are several limitations to this study, such as ignoring behaviors not listed on the rating sheet and recording only exchanges involving the teacher, its findings are immediately applicable to the classroom, for they support the contention that it is not so much the use of free drills or controlled drills as the variability in the use of different drills that correlated highly with student achievement.

Naiman, Frohlich & Stern (1975) were interested in investigating the learning strategies of good language students in Ontario, Canada. In addition to testing and interviewing them, the researchers developed an observation schedule that concentrated on describing the classroom behaviors of successful and unsuccessful language students at grades 8, 10 and 12.

Although their interest was in learning strategies of students, they incidently discovered how little free discussion occurs in the language classroom. They reported that the most frequent type of teacher question in the three grades examined elicited specific information.

Naiman et.al. felt that "...teachers should be made aware of the fact that they are not utilizing a broad enough variety of possible elicitations, especially with respect to elicitation of clarification, elaboration, and mutual correction." (P. 370)

Although their focus was on learning and not on teaching strategies, these researchers found the absence of a system that analyzed language teaching to be a decided disadvantage, and they recommended further research

in identifying and classifying teaching techniques and in gauging the effectiveness of alternative techniques for different kinds of students.

Simon & Boyer (1974) had categorized all systems used for direct observation of classroom processes into two major categories: those that focus upon the cognitive aspects of classroom behavior and those that examine the social climate of the classroom. The system most widely used to describe and modify teacher behavior has been Flanders' Interaction Analysis, which belongs in the second group.

Flanders, who was interested in studying the influence of the teacher upon student behavior, felt that when the teacher exerted direct influence, he restricted the student's freedom of action, making him more dependent upon the teacher. Indirect teacher influence, however, encouraged student initiative and expanded his freedom of action. (1974: P. 114)

Five different modifications of Flanders' system have been developed to describe the social climate of the second or foreign language classroom. Of the group, Nearhoof (1969), Rothfarb (1970), and Moskowitz (1968, 1973) developed their adaptations of Flanders' system for the training of language teachers, but have not done any research with them. McArdle & Scebold (1968) used their system to train language teachers during a three-month workshop at the University of Nebraska in the summer of 1968. However, they have not reported any results. Wragg (1970) observed ten student-teachers of French and German teach one lesson each at the University of Exeter, England, and then tallied the first twenty minutes of each lesson. He reported that 82% of the lesson consisted of talk and that, on the average, 59% of the total talk was in the foreign language.

What was especially intriguing about his findings was the fact that the talk of teachers and students differed according to the language that they were speaking. Teachers tended to talk more when the native language was used. Although some teachers switched back to the native language to praise students, all ten switched to it when they criticized students.

Wragg also found that student utterances in the target language were made only in reply to teacher questions or commands. He concluded that "Presumably, only when children are first of all sufficiently confident and, secondly, when they feel competent will there be a significantly larger amount of spontaneous talk initiated by the children in the foreign language." (P. 118)

These systems represent an objective, systematic approach to the social climate of the language classroom, and they measure not only the amount of teacher talk and student talk in both the native and target languages, but also the degree of teacher 'directness' or domination of student responses. However, there are several limitations to these systems. Categories are purposely rather gross. For example, all non-verbal behavior is coded with one number only. The areas of content discussed are not examined, and the

system does not distinguish among the many different kinds of open-ended student utterances.

Although little research has been done with these systems in language classrooms, numerous studies, including Amidon (1970) and Finske (1967), have reported the success of Flanders' Interaction Analysis in training teachers to exhibit indirect behavior. Moreover, Bondi (1970) found that student-teachers who were trained in the use of Interaction Analysis and who received feedback with it were significantly more indirect than student-teachers who had not received such training and feedback.

Fanselow's FOCUS (1976) is the first comprehensive system developed to describe verbal and non-verbal communication within a language classroom. Galloway (1962) and Grant & Hennings (1971) recognized the importance of describing non-verbal behaviors in the classroom, and developed systems that analyzed and described them exclusively. Fanselow has incorporated procedures for describing non-verbal interaction into his system, which he based upon Bellack et. al.'s (1966) basic concept that all discourse in the classroom can be divided into four moves according to their pedagogical purposes. They found that teachers make almost all of the structuring, soliciting and reacting moves, while students are mainly responsible for the responding moves.

Fanselow developed a conceptual framework and an operationally defined technical language to describe, classify and analyze communications in second or foreign language classrooms. He distinguished five characteristics of communication: the source, the medium, the use, the content covered and the pedagogical purpose. (a: Pp. 3-4)

Unlike Flanders' or Moskowitz's systems, which begin with what Dunkin & Biddle refer to as a "commitment" or a bias that "indirect" teacher influence is more desirable than "direct" influence, Fanselow's system has no such commitment. FOCUS, which overlaps into Simon & Boyer's two major categories of affective and cognitive systems, purports only to provide a technical language and a conceptual framework within which teacher and student communication in a second or foreign language classroom can be described and analyzed. How the system is used is up to the individual teachers, supervisors or researchers. (a: P. 3)

Preliminary results from four research studies which used this system suggest that the teacher overwhelmingly dominates the classroom interactions and that both teacher and student exhibit a highly limited repetoire of behaviors.

Fanselow (1976) videotaped approximately fifty teachers of English as a Second Language who were teaching reading and/or oral skills at university and adult levels, and reported that the teacher was responsible for all of the structuring moves, as well as the bulk of the soliciting and reacting moves. Students dominated the responding moves. He also noted that the

bulk of the tasks set by the teacher for the students involved simple recall.

Rwakyaka (1976) studied twenty Ugandan teachers of ESL at the secondary level, each of whom taught one reading and one oral lesson, and reported similar findings. Teachers accounted for approximately 65% of all moves, and 75% of all talk. They also dominated all of the structuring moves, and most of the soliciting and reacting moves. As was found in other studies, students were responsible for almost all of the responding moves.

Gamta (1976) reported highly similar results in his description of four student-teachers of ESL, all of whom were teaching oral skills to adults. However, he noted that teachers made only a little over half of all classroom moves. This differs from other studies which reported that, on the average, teachers make approximately two-thirds of all moves.

Shapiro (197 ?) is currently using this system to describe interaction in elementary level ESL reading classrooms, and to note the stability of observed patterns of teacher-student interaction over the course of an academic year.

Between the second and third videotaped observations, the teachers were trained with this system to exhibit certain 'desirable' behaviors, (such as having students perform a wider range of tasks, employ more mediums of communication and use the target language to communicate personal feelings and opinions). The system was then used to gauge the influence of this in-service performance feedback training upon the patterns of interaction in the classroom. However, she has not yet reported any results.

V. Final Remarks: What Still Needs To Be Done

On the positive side, we have seen the slow, yet steady trend toward objective research on language teaching. Researchers and teacher-trainers have begun to realize that we must first know what teachers actually do, as opposed to what they say they do or think they do, before we can hope to effect any changes in their teaching behaviors. We have also finally recognized the need for hard facts and empirical evidence that correlate specific teaching behaviors with specific student outcomes before we can assert the superiority of one methodological school of language teaching over another, or of one teaching technique or device over another.

Obviously, researchers have barely scratched the surface. What we need are more studies, that are experimental as well as descriptive in nature, that can contribute to our paltry body of knowledge on language teaching. We also need more studies in order to validate the systems that have already been developed.

We need to approach the field of language teaching with clear, objective eyes, and without preconceived notions or 'commitments' to one particular approach. We need to move away from vague or judgmental terms that color and distort discussion to a technical, operationally defined language that can be used by teacher, supervisor and researcher alike to discuss and to describe the process of language teaching.

Hopefully, with empirical evidence, we will be able to move from description to prescription, and away from the belief that "good" teaching need be the art of a chosen few. Only in this way can we hope to expand the number of effective teachers in the field of language teaching.

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